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ABSTRACT

Project TELEPAC utilized the telephone to provide access to professional skills by parents of handicapped children located throughout Utah and the loan of self instructional packages designed to teach self help and academic skills. Parents called the center on a toll free number and reported satisfaction with the project. Staff members used the system to evaluate the instructional packages. A telephone based delivery system is appropriate for areas that face problems such as limited availability of professionals and limitations imposed by time and distance. (DB)

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Project TELEPAC

The Telephone as an Instructional Communication Device for Parents of Handicapped Children and Youth

by

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Paper presented at the 54th Annual International Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children, Chicago, April, 1976.

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The Telephone as an Instructional Communication Device

Despite the availability of the telephone to the education profession, Rao and Hicks (1972) noted that educators have not realized the full potential of the telephone as an instructional communications device even though the availability of the standard telephone network makes it technically and economically advantageous for many educational applications. Attempts at using the telephone have occurred in the areas of nursing education (Puzzuoli, 1971), university extension courses (Parker, 1974), and special education (Steele, 1969; Wrightstone, 1968). A consistent finding in the above studies was that the use of the telephone was economical, reduced travel time, and extended the influence of instruction to wide audiences.

In an effort to involve parents in the education of their handicapped children and youth, Project TELEPAC implemented a service delivery model which made use of the standard telephone to provide access to a team of professionals and services located at the University Affiliated Exceptional Child Center, Logan, Utah. These services included the use or loan of:

(1) Parent Involvement Packages

(2) Books and pamphlets from the Parent Resource Library

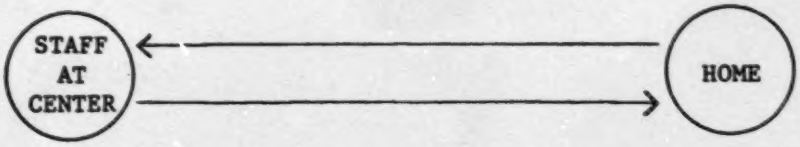
(3) Films and mediated training packages from the Multi-Media Collection

Participating parents throughout urban and rural Utah were provided a toll-free telephone number to use when contacting project

staff. Calls received after working hours were recorded by an automatic answering device. The telephone system used by staff and parents was the Wide Areas Telecommunications System (WATS) which provided service at approximately $12.00 per hour of use. Attempts at equipping parent and staff telephones with interactive speakers or amplifying devices were abandoned because of poor quality and unreliability of the equipment field-tested.

Unlike other parent involvement models which utilized home visitors to train and observe parents (Shearer & Shearer, 1972), Project TELEPAC relied upon self-instructional packages designed to teach basic self-help and academic skills. During development, the telephone was used by staff members to collect specific information concerning strengths and weaknesses of the packages. This information was analyzed and provided direction for revision and improvement. During operational field testing, the following telephone interactions took place between parents and project staff:

Telephone Interactions



(A) Parent: Discuss problems encountered in instruction when using packages.

(B) Parent: Seek direction for new assignments or modifying task.

(C) Parent: Make request for items from Parent Resource Library or Multi-Media Collection.

(D) Center: Provide support and encouragement to parents; refer parents to local agencies for needed assistance (e.g., health related requests).

(E) Center: Collect data on priority problem areas.

(F) Center: Collect evaluative data concerning parents perception of the value of project services; arrange pre/post-testing of child.

The major innovation of this project was the combination of telephone communication with the technology of instructional packages to involve parents in the education of their handicapped children. The use of a Wide Area Telephone System provided a reliable and cost-effective method of communicating with participating parents. It would appear that a telephone based delivery model would provide services in areas that face problems of:

(1) Limited availability of professionals

(2) Limitations imposed by time and distance

(3) Limited funds suitable for continuation after expiration of development funds

Results of an experimental study are currently being gathered and analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the telephone supported delivery model on selected academic and self-help skills of handicapped children and youth. However, evaluation data collected via telephone have indicated that parents expressed overall satisfaction with the project and appreciated someone with whom to discuss their worries and problems. The telephone, therefore, provided a means to offer expanded educational opportunities to parents and children in need of extraordinary services.

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